United Nations

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council, in Presidential statement last night, condemns continuing military attacks in eastern Bosnia by Serb military units and calls for increased presence of UNPROFOR; demands full engagement by all parties in peace talks in New York.

+ Secretary-General protests letter to "American people" by Radovan Karadzic, Bosnian Serb leader, concerning World Trade Centre explosion in New York; letter retracted by Mr. Karadzic.

+ In message on occasion of International Women's Day, Secretary-General says promotion and protection of rights of women central to the work of the United Nations.

+ Department of Humanitarian Affairs launches appeal for $166.5 million for relief and rehabilitation programme in Somalia for this year.

+ Security Council Sanctions Committee on South Africa asks Swiss Government to take measures to prevent proposed export of 60 Pilatus PC-7 trainer aircraft to South Africa.

+ Palestinian Rights Committee to focus on follow-up to Security Council demand for immediate return of Palestinian deportees.

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The Security Council last night condemned the continuing military attacks in eastern Bosnia by Serb paramilitary units "even as peace talks are continuing in New York", and expressed particular concern over the fall of the town of Cerska and the imminent fall of neighbouring villages. The Council took that action through a statement read out on its behalf by its President, Donald McKinnon, Foreign Minister of New Zealand.

The Council demanded that the killings of innocent civilians and other atrocities stop and reaffirmed that those guilty of war crimes would be held individually responsible by the world community. It also demanded that humanitarian relief operations be given unimpeded access to the besieged

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cities of eastern Bosnia and that the wounded civilians be evacuated. It asked that the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) increase its presence in eastern Bosnia.

The Council also stated that it was ready to meet at any moment to consider further action.

The meeting was held in response to urgent requests from the United States and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The letter from Bosnia stated that the Serbian leadership had issued an order to wipe out or drive out the peoples of Cerska and Srebrenica before American humanitarian airdrops could save them from starvation. Serbian forces had blocked all humanitarian land convoys and, in the last 72 hours, killed 2,000 civilians, the letter said. Thousands of people had been displaced. The new attacks threatened the entire peace process and the efforts of those trying to save the people of eastern Bosnia, the letter concluded.

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A United Nations spokesman said today that Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had protested a letter written by Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, "to the American people", in which he said "the tragic and deplorable incident at the World Trade Centre is fresh testimony to the extraordinary volatility and immediate dangers of direct foreign involvement" in the conflict in former Yugoslavia. Mr. Karadzic told the Secretary-General during a meeting today that he would retract the statement.

At a press conference at Headquarters this afternoon, Mr. Karadzic, while asking correspondents to ignore his statement, explained he had merely wished to express astonishment that the United States might be exposed to international terrorism.

Mr. Karadzic said he wanted to inform correspondents about fights in eastern Bosnia, where Muslims, for two months, had mounted "a terrible offensive trying to redraw the maps" dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into ten semi-autonomous provinces, as proposed by the Co-Chairmen of the Yugoslav Conference. Serbs were "under the attack of Muslim forces", he said, and Serbian villages had been burnt down. Mass graves with massacred Serbian civilians had been found, but the international press had ignored those reports, he said.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his message on the occasion of the International Women's Day on 8 March, has stressed that the promotion and protection of the rights of women are central to the work of the United Nations.

As half of humanity was made up of women, he said, their rights were high on the agenda of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and of the World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in Vienna in June. The

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international community also looked forward to the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995.

About 119 countries -- more than two thirds of the current United Nations membership -- had subscribed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, he noted. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, now in draft, was expected to be adopted by the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali called for redoubled efforts within communities and at the grass-roots level, in places of education and employment, to ensure that women were treated fairly and without discrimination. As chief administrative officer of the United Nations, he said he had "responsibility" to ensure that promotion and advancement were open to women.

The Secretary-General also noted that while there had been steady progress in the articulation and implementation of women's rights in many countries, a reversion to barbarism had occured in others. Some countries had seen the use of systematic sexual violence against women as a weapon of war to degrade and humiliate entire populations. "Rape is the most despicable crime against women; mass rape is an abomination", he said.

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The United Nations today launched an appeal to the international community for $166.5 million in humanitarian assistance to cover the relief and rehabilitation programme in Somalia for this year.

At a press conference at Headquarters today, Jan Eliasson, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said the United Nations was preparing "very intensely" for the next phase of the Somalia operation - first major step towards rebuilding the economic and social fabric of that country. Hopefully by the end of this year, he said, the world would be able to see in Somalia a transition from "relief to rehabilitation and recovery".

The major issues to be addressed were the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons and the rebuilding of the local economy by providing jobs for the many Somalis who were currently unemployed. Moreover, he said, for the programme to succeed, a secure environment throughout Somalia and the continued support of donors were essential.

He pointed out that the United States-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) operation had been helpful in creating a situation where relief supplies could reach thousands of people. However, he warned, there was still a great need for humanitarian assistance, as nearly two million Somalis continued to be threatened by starvation.

The rehabilitation programme for Somalia would be discussed at a meeting in Addis Ababa from 11 to 13 March with representation from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), NGO's, as well as the Somali people. A pledging conference has been scheduled on the

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last day of the meeting, which would be followed by a Conference on National Reconciliation beginning on 15 March.

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The Chairman of the Security Council Sanctions Committee on South Africa has asked the Government of Switzerland to take all measures to prevent plans by a Swiss company to export some 60 Pilatus PC-7 trainer aircraft to South Africa.

In a statement issued today following a meeting at Headquarters, the Committee said the sale was "contrary to the spirit and intent" of Security Council resolution 418 (1977) which had established a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. It further noted that a reply from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations concerning the proposed sale had not been "satisfactory".

The statement also noted that in resolutions 418 (1977) and 591 (1986), the Council had urged all States "to prohibit the export to South Africa of items which they have reason to believe are destined for military and/or police forces in South Africa; have military capacity and are intended for military purposes."

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The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has decided to focus on the follow-up to the Security Council's demand late last year that Israel, as occupying Power, ensure the safe and immediate return of some 400 Palestinians deported to southern Lebanon in mid-December.

Approving its work programme for 1993 yesterday, the Committee said priority would also be given to the issues of ending the violations of human rights and the settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and ensuring the safety of Palestinian civilians.

Nasser Al-Kidwa, Observer for Palestine, told the Committee that the primary concern of the Palestinian people regarding the resumption of the peace process remained the question of the Palestinian deportees and their return home.

The Committee has also begun preparations for the North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine and has established standing committees on seven specific issues, including human rights and international humanitarian law, to make the Symposium more productive. The Symposium, scheduled to take place at Headquarters from 30 June to 3 July, has as its theme, "Building for Peace and Palestine: Priorities for the Second Decade of the NGO Movement".

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